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The
Two Hundred and Fortieth Anniversary

of the

Pittsgrove Baptist Church

September 18th, 1921

The Brick Meeting House was erected on the site of the Old Frame Meeting House that was used for over a century, and occupied the site of the Log Meeting House and the Old Log Schoolhouse of the early days of 1681. (See Ebenezer Sheppard's Record and Documents; also History of Pittsgrove Baptist Church). Among the Ministers who labored with acceptance in those formative days of our Colonial History on this field were: The Revs. Fordham, Hatcham, Killingsworth, Black, Jenkins, Kelsay, et al. All noble, loyal, heroic spirits, whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

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HISTORICAL SERMON

Historical Sermon Delivered at the Morning Service of the Two Hundred and Fortieth Anniversary of the Pittsgrove Baptist Church September 18th, 1921, by the Pastor, Rev. Joshua E. Wills, D. D.

"Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." The text beloved, is recorded in 1st Samuel, Chapter 7, verse 12. It is not our purpose at this time to give an extended recital or reference and notice of the Lord's gracious dealings with the Israelites of old, interesting as the narrative is. Our purpose is to give merely a scriptural setting, with an historical background, as it were, to the matter we have in mind today, as we gather this beautiful morning to celebrate the Two Hundred and Fortieth Anniversary of the Pittsgrove Church.

The history of the people of God, all along the trail of the ages, has ever been associated with trials and experiences very similar to our forbears of ancient days. The story of Israel's perambulations are in a measure but the often repeated and re-inacted journeyings of the traveler Zionward. Israel's Prophet could declare, "Hitherto the Lord hath helped us;" and so too the Church of Christ found her strength and solace in the unfailing grace of the Lord Jesus, amid all the changing relations of life.

First things first, and the way to begin anything is to begin at the beginning. The first known discoverer of the American Continent, it is claimed with some warrant of acceptance, was John Cabot, an Englishman, accompanied by his son Sebastian, who left England in the late 1500, several years prior to Christopher Columbus or Americus Vespucius on their voyages of discovery and if old English documents are creditable, there were aboard that ship men who joined John Cabot's expedition, Baptists from the Southwest of England and the Welsh principalities. Later there was John Patient, a Baptist, who accompanied the Dutch navigator, Captain Cornelius Jacobesen Mey in 1614; and there was a Welsh Baptist, John Morgan, who accompanied the Dutch Commander De Vries, who commanded the ship "Squirrel", who informed the British of the killing of the crew of the English shallop and of her burning to the water's edge. De Vries followed Mey twelve years later, so the Baptists are not poachers in other's preserves when it comes to early American discoveries. The Baptists were prior to the Episcopalians, because there were no Protestant Episcopal Churches until 1531 (see British Parliamentary enactment, statute 37, chapter 17); there were no Presbyterians until 1560, founded at Scotland (see General Assembly).

There was no Methodist Church until 1787, which was founded at Baltimore. There were no Roman Catholic Churches allowed in Jersey and in many of the Colonies in the early formative period, save in Maryland. So Baptists had a field of operation, notwithstanding their later persecution at the hands of the various Protestant Bodies of later organization and origin.

Baptists trace their origin, not by the marks of a World-patterned heredity, but by the distinctive New Testament, "Primitive Christianity," as freed from all the man-evolved, World-patterned conception, "after the rudiments of men, and not after Christ." Baptists are not so much concerned about a geneological descent as they are about the reproduction of the Christ life, in the Believer. There aim and object, all down the trail of the Ages, has ever been to adorn the Doctrine of God our Saviour and give no place to the "enticing words of man's wisdom" with their accompanying will-worship and ecclesiastical parade, with its Holy days and ceremonial observances. To the Baptist, the religion of the Lord Jesus Christ is a new life, begotten by the Holy Spirit, and "if a man be in Christ, he is a new Creation," and "if a man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of His." It is Christ in you; the hope of Glory the test of Discipleship. The Baptists have ever continued in the Faith, once delivered to the Saints and believe obedience is better than sacrifice, and stood loyal to its acceptance of One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism, One Saviour and Redeemer of all believers. The Baptists down the trail of the ages, have obeyed the apostolic injunction, "Keep the ordinances as I delivered them unto you," in their apostolic purity and agreeable to the practice of the Primitive Apostolic Church. With this in mind, we now give attention to the 240th anniversary of the Pittsgrove Church.

The History of the Pittsgrove Baptist Church had its inception in the early days of the "Stuarts," that unique era of English history so significant and important in the religious and civic life of Protestantism.

The itinerant preachers from the Continent had spread the glad tidings of the Gospel among the masses of the English speaking people and had created a desire for the Bible to be received as an article of religion in the established Church of England, much against the expressed wishes of the Anglican Clergy (see Bishop Short's History Church of England). The attempt to suppress the reading of the Bible by the Anglican Clergy led to much opposition and unrest. This found expression in various groups throughout the British Realm and among the little

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groups in the forefront were the men of Scrooby, whose leaders were those heroic men, who have become famous in the annals of American History and known as the Pilgrim Fathers. All honor to the Pilgrim Company and the memory of the Mayflower, but much as we admire and esteem the Pilgrim Fathers, there were other heroic spirits in that formative era of our colonial history, who have passed to their rest and reward all but unnoticed. Among them was the Pioneer Baptist preacher, Rev. Thomas Patient who visited the colonies prior to Roger Williams and preached the Gospel in the Old Colony, and was driven out to seek home and asylum elsewhere. Patient in 1629 preached to the Lenape Tribe of Indians and later wended his way to Virginia, where he received a similar reception from those Anglican Cavaliers that had been meted out to him by his Puritan Brethern.

Thos. Patient retraced his steps and sought and found a hospitable reception at the hands of the Red Indians in the woods (see Brown's History of the Rise and Progress of the Baptists in Ireland; or Pittsgrove, page 69; Newman's Notes, page 23). Prior to Patient, a loyal Gospel loving Dutchman crossed from Manhattan to the newly formed settlement at Bergen, where our good Dutch brother, Routige, in 1614, preached the "Word of Life" and began a work of promise until he was suddenly called up higher.

Thomas Bradford Fordham, of Salt Ash, Devonshire, England, a Baptist minister, settled in Virginia and began a labor among the Colonists, but incurred the displeasure of the Anglican Clergy, who led an infuriated mob to drive him and his son from their home. Fordham settled in Virginia in 1636, and took up land later in New Cesarea, now New Jersey, in 1676, at Oldmans where he and his son labored in the Gospel, both with the white settlers and the Indians (see Fordham's deed to William Kelly, for 13 pounds deed executed by his grandson in 1738), (Note—The Baptists of Oldmans, in or about 1745, disbanded and sought fellowship in the Pittsgrove Baptist Church—see record of the late Ebenezer Sheppard, Church Clerk).

Rev. Thomas Hatcham ministered at the Baptist Meeting House in 1680; settled in South Jersey in 1678; sold his farms October 1711 (see record and family history).

In the early formative days of our Colonial history there were many little groups or companies of Christians scattered through the Wilderness, whose entire time was occupied in clearing their lands, and providing for their

wants. There were no Associational gatherings. They were unaffiliated and independent in that era. Elizabethtown was far removed. Travellers endured hardship and privation. Marriages were expensive, and bonds were required in proof of ability to support the wife.

One Thomas Killingsworth arrived from England with his scholastic ability and legal training. A new era developed. The Baptists of that formative day and subsequent time were and are, much indebted to this wise and able Christian gentleman, who wrought such a splendid service for the cause of soul liberty. When Thomas Killingsworth preached to the Indian Tribe, he was amazed to find the older Indians had heard about Jesus, through the Deep Water Jesus Man of Many Moons. This heroic preacher left his impress on the religious life of his times more than any other preacher of that notable era. Killingsworth extended his itinerary over a wide stretch of the settlement. He ministered at Middletown in 1688, and later at Pittsgrove and Cohansey. He formed the Church at Salem about 1706. A great leader, a fine scholar, an humble minister of the Lord Jesus.

Killingsworth was followed by various ministerial brethern, among them was Rev. Brooks, from Ireland, Rev. Kelsey, also from Ireland; Rev. Jenkins, from Wales, and Rev. Smalley, of the Colony. All labored with much acceptance, when lo! the lean time came with its dark cloud that overspread the spiritual horizon. The Pro-British sentiment was very pronounced in the colony. The settlers had their trying experience with the Dutch at Manhattan and the French at New Orleans and the Ultra Catholic Spaniards, of Florida and the Great Southwest, the wilderness beyond. The settlers were largely British, not only by birth and citizenship, but because of the distinctive Protestant characteristics of the British, contrasted with the other nations who were Catholics with the exception of the Dutch.

A new and trying spirit appears at this juncture in the person of John Wills, a preacher of singular ability, who was born above Burlington, the son of the distinguished James Wills, of great political fame, and an officer of our Pre-Revolutionary Government. The Rev. John Wills was decidedly and very pronounced Pro-British, and went to England rather than support the patriots who were now very actively engaged in exciting and spreading Revolutionary ideas broadcast, causing the taking a stand, either for, or against the British King. John Wills gathered a number of dissatisfied and kindred spirits and went to England where he became a pastor and later serv-

ed a Church at Oakingham, where he also opened a school for "Young Gentle Folks." (See English minutes for 1787, page 9).

It was during this exciting and trying time the Pittsgrove Baptist Church suffered great numerical losses, and about 1759 or 1760 the "Feeble Folks" sought and found fellowship with the brethern at Cohansey and continued with the Cohansey Church until 1771, when the changed conditions in the Colony warranted them in asking for letters to re-establish themselves as an independent Church and right here it is worthy of note, to say much confusion and misunderstanding have taken place, due to the fact that the prior organization of the Pittsgrove Baptist Church has been overlooked.

In further corroboration of the prior origin of the Pittsgrove Church to the year 1771, the Pittsgrove Baptist Church bought land in 1729, (see deed) ; and also bought land at Scultown in 1738 (see deed) ; and in 1740 erected a Meeting House and set apart a brother to work at the ministry at Scultown. In 1743 the Old Log Meeting House was removed and the beloved Rev. Robert Kelsey led in erecting on the same spot, a frame building, well and securely framed together of good oak hewed timber, the new building being of considerable dimensions.

Records show that the home of the Rev. Robert Kelsay was burned down in the winter of 1740, said parsonage being located above the Pole Tavern Road.

The marble block that is placed in the front of the Old Brick Church Building refutes the statement that Pittsgrove Church had its origin in 1771. The inscription cut in the block and placed in the building at the erection reads: "This Baptist Building was founded in 1743 and rebuilt in 1811."

The Indian name of New Jersey was Schequicktrans. The Dutch called it New Netherlands, while the early settlers called it New Cesarea, and it became known and continues to be the renamed State of New Jersey, in honor of Sir George Carteret, former Governor of the Isle of Jersey, and one of the original proprietors. The Rev. John S. Eisenburg began his ministerial labors in 1837 and during his pastorate he gave much consideration to historical matters and in a communication to Ebenezer Sheppard, Church Clerk, dated 1872, wrote of the early founding of the Old Log Meeting House. A reference is also made to Rev. Thomas Bridge, an English brother who settled in or near Fairfield, which in those days was the County Seat. He was of prior days to Rev. Joseph Shep-

pard with whom he corresponded. It is claimed with some show of acceptance and credibility that Bridgeton took its name from the Rev. Thomas Bridge. A Baptist Meeting House was at Back Neck in the early days of 1692.

Some confusion and misunderstanding have been for years in the minds of our friends to satisfactorily reconcile the difficulties that gathered around and about the name Cohansey. Was it a location, a district in Salem County, or was it the name in the early days of a family of Indians of the Lenape Tribe who roamed throughout all the South and West Jerseys, from Cape May Point to the Upper Delaware? If we are correctly informed there was no such locality as Cohansey. Originally it may have been the name of the Indian Tribe, who gave this name to the creek or river. There was no Roadstown. It is of subsequent data. There are no records extant, we are informed, that can possibly locate the place of the original Cohansey Meeting House. Cohansey was a name given, as we have already said, to a large territory in Southern Jersey and later localized. We are constrained to believe the Old Log Meeting House, situated on the Kings Highway was the original Cohansey Place of Worship.

It should be borne in mind that the early groups of Colonial Baptists were unaffiliated. There were no associational connection or organization until a later date. As late as 1688 there were only thirteen known Baptist Churches in the colonies. There were unquestionably many unnumbered and unknown bodies who held forth the "Lamp of Life in the New World," just as there were in Germany and other continental European countries, who came to the forefront when the reformation became a factor in the religious life of the times.

There were laboring, unknown and unhearalded men in the Gospel Ministry, who toiled at farming during the week days and on the Lord's Day preached the Old Gospel. Some of those noble heroic spirits of that formative era have come to notice only of comparative recent date.

It may be pardonable for me, a descendent of the Wills family, who became so prominently connected and identified with the early history of our State of New Jersey, if you will look at Aaron Leaming's grants and concessions of New Jersey for 1664 to 1682, you will see that the Wills family took no small place in the public notice of that era. Many of them were among the first office holders and legislators of the Colony. Lemuel Wills, a clergyman of the Church of England, was imprisoned in England in 1644 and his son settled in Jer-

sey and was among the earliest settlers and land owners of that day. It was the descent of this Wills family, the Rev. John Wills, though born in Jersey and was Pro-British and gathered about him a company that went to England, where he, John Wills, became a Baptist Pastor in England, and later at Oakingham, in Berkshire, and taught a select school for Gentle Folks that he founded there. John Wills was one of my progenitors.

It is difficult to trace Colonial History in our own land, because of the fragmentary historical documents. Our settlers and pioneers were devoted to clearing their lands and following husbandry, and not so much concerned about public affairs and events. That was reserved for a later era.

The young swains visited this old Church from all parts of the countryside (see Pittsgrove, page 83). The frame building was removed to Yorktown and a substantial red brick building was erected during the ministry of the Rev. Charles Kane, 1843. The large and modern auditorium was erected during the pastorate of the Rev. Levanus Myers. There have been in continuous succession, twenty-six pastors serving the Church since the re-organization in 1771 and prior to its re-organization the ministry is of irregular date and extent and in common with the larger company of Baptist unconcerned. The old pre-revolutionary Baptist Church Clerks were not given to writing and keeping their Church records with a view to informing future posterity, as it was simply a matter for the convenience of the local Church.

It is claimed, and that with a fair warrant of acceptance, that the Baptists are so busy in making history they have little or no time for repeating it.

The Pittsgrove Church was especially fortunate in having among their number a man of unusual calibre, whom they elected Church Clerk. Mr. Ebenezer Sheppard, who was a graduate of Brown in 1838, took his degree and entered his profession as a lawyer. Much of the conveyancing in South Jersey was done by Mr. E. Sheppard and the records of the Pittsgrove Church is a monument to his painstaking and scholastic ability. Few indeed, of our Baptist Churches, have Church records comparable with the Pittsgrove Baptist Church, and those records are supplemented by rare old documents and deeds of the pre-revolutionary era which add a singular value in their confirmation of the early history of the Pittsgrove Baptist Church.

It is of especial interest to the student of our early

formative Baptist history to follow the labors of Rev. Thomas Patient, the remarkable and unique character of our colonial days.

Rev. Thomas Patient was the son of John Patient, an English ex-Naval Officer. He was of a good family connected with the "Quality," born in Devonshire, England, and educated at Winchester for the Establishment. His father, John Patient, who was of pronounced religious convictions, left England owing to the corrupt lives of the clergy and sought fellowship with the French Protestants at Rochell, France, where he tarried for a brief season, mingling with the French brethern in their endeavors for the Reformed Religion. John Patient was an Englishman and found the French ideas decidedly foreign to him. He returned to England and became associated with the men of Scrooby, and went over to Holland, where he became acquainted with Cornelius Jacobsen Mey, the celebrated Dutch navigator, who was a pronounced Protestant and a kindred spirit with John Patient. Sir Walter Raleigh's reports of the New World's wonders were at that time attracting the attention of the known civilized World, especially of the British Isles and Holland.

Great enterprises were embarked, among them the Dutch Indian trade. Holland then carried the "broom at the masthead of her ships," signifying she swept the seas and bid defiance to all comers on the ocean waves.

Captain Mey visited the New World and came up the Delaware in 1614, accompanied by John Patient as his chief mate. On Captain Mey's return, John Patient accompanied him and did much toward influencing the men of Scrooby, who had settled in Holland, to fix their eyes toward the land beyond the seas. On John Patient's second visit to the New World he became much impressed and prevailed on his son, Rev. Thos. Patient, who had left the Episcopal Church because of his accepting the New Testament teachings on Baptism (see Brown's history of the Rise and Progress of the Baptists in Ireland, and Cathcart's Encyclopedia). On Thomas Patient's visit to the Colonies he met anything but a cordial reception at the hands of his fellow colonists (see Pittsgrove, page 69). Thomas Patient returned to England in 1629 or the early 1630 and became identified later with William Kiffin, and was among the signers of "Bleeding Hearts," and also took a prominent part in the great religious controversies then rampant in London especially, and throughout the British Isles, as well as upon the Continent. In Oliver Cromwell's time, and of Charles 1st, the round heads lead in the religious affairs, largely led by the Presbyter-

ians, who took over many of the Parish Churches. The Baptists also played a very important part and especially active was Thomas Patient, the co-pastor with William Kiffin at Devonshire Square Baptist Church, London, England. On the Proctor Cromwell's going to Ireland in 1654, to punish the Irish for the awful massacres of 1644, Patient accepted the appointment to the Dublin Cathedral at a salary of £200 per annum, when Cromwell drove out the Anglican Clergy from their livings in the Establishment. On Cromwell's return to England, Patient began a very extensive preaching itinerary thru the South and Southwest of Ireland, especially through the Galty mountain district, and among the Churches formed and organized was the Church at Clough, Keating County, Tipperary. The Irish Nobleman, Sir Robert Carr, gathered a company of Protestant Irish and formed what is known as Carr's expedition, in 1664, and among the company were some Irish Baptists from Clough Keating Church, who came and settled in South Jersey and formed the nucleus around which gathered the Baptists that finally developed into the Pittsgrove Baptist Church.

A Log Meeting House was erected on the King's Highway in 1681, and was later demolished after years of blessed usefulness. The Pittsgrove history is interwoven with the pre-colonial era and the Revolutionary days. The old cemetery contains the graves of many of the Patriots of 1776 and of prior times.

The history of the Pittsgrove Church is worthy of mention in the annals of our American Church life. Few indeed, of our Baptist Churches enjoy a record comparable with the early days of this Christian company that gathered to worship the Lord in the formative era of our colonial history, and few indeed, have enjoyed the services and fellowship of a more self-sacrificing, loyal, devoted ministry, who through winter storm or summer sunshine, preached the "Word of Life."

The old Church has put on new vigor and is in line for greater things for the Lord Jesus, and the making known the purpose of His grace, to the uttermost bounds of the Earth, through the missionary enterprises of the Baptist fraternity, and the loyalty of its membership to the community where it has held forth the lamp of life for 240 years of loyal ministry to the truth as it is in Jesus.

The Hymn, especially composed by the Rev. Thomas Broxhome, of New York State, was sung at the services.

ANNIVERSARY SERVICES

"Our Old Church Home"

(By Rev. Thomas Broxhome. Air: "Home, Sweet Home")

Mid chapels and churches, where'er we may roam,
There never is a place like our old Church home,
A sweetness in worship we seem to find there,
Which, seek where we may, is ne'er met with elsewhere.

Home, home, old Church home,
There never is a place
Like our old Church home.

A sight of its humble form does our hearts good;
The sound of its bell cheers as nothing else could,
Without and within there's a charm to the place,
Which, roam where we may, time can never efface.

A homeness prevails when we worship God there!
Oh, how well we know it—it's felt in the prayer,
The Scriptures that's read, and the sermon preached then,
It's heard in the hymns and the final Amen!

This appropriate selection was effectively and beautifully rended by the augumented choir, with instrumental accompaniment, to the great delight of the large congregation present.

The Hymns, "O, God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come;" "How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord," and "My Country Tis of Thee," were rendered by the congregation, the choir assisting.

The Bible used on this occasion was the Breeches Bible of 1610, used by the sainted John Robinson August 15th, 1620, on the Pilgrim Fathers boarding the Mayflower then riding at the quay, from the "East Gate," Southampton, England. The Scripture read by John Robinson was the 90th Psalm, and the same Psalm was read at our Two Hundred and Fortieth Anniversary—"Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations;" so appropriate for this occasion. We rejoice today and cry, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us."

The historic Documents in the possession of persons, residents of Pittsgrove and vicinity, are of great value as being corroborative of the early history of Pittsgrove Baptist Church, whose beginnings were so closely associated with that formative era of our Colonial life. Those documents present an irrefutable proof of the credibility of the early organization and association of Ye Baptist forebears with those prior-Revolutionary days.

Records show that Pittsgrove joined hands with their Irish brethren at Clough Keating's Baptist Church as late as 1854 and correspondence had been enjoyed with the brethren of the Emerald Isle for many years; indeed until the Clough Keating Church disbanded. An incident of more than passing interest took place at our 238th anniversary when the venerable deacon, Joseph Morgan, related his experience of 84 years ago and told of his grandfather speaking of the old log meetinghouse and the log school buildings that he attended with Isaac Sickler and Mary Harris; all of the aforesaid were over 80 years of age. Governor Runyon, who delivered the oration on that occasion, commented on the venerable trio testimonies as being "unimpeachable."

There is no record at Salem of a log schoolhouse being there, yet here is the testimony of three living witnesses who attended the log schoolhouse eighty-four years ago and further explained where the "King's Highway" was located and how they were familiar with the locality.

Deacon Harry P. Gray said that a relative of his, an old lady, stated that she in her youth remembered seeing General George Washington on the Nelson Farm with other officers. The Pole is an historic center, unique in American history. Here the first military organization was organized and the first liberty pole erected. Surely with such a glorious, historic heritage, we can rejoice today and declare with God's ministers of old, "Hitherto the Lord hath helped us all along the trail of our unique and remarkable history of 240 years."

At the afternoon rally services, choice selections of instrumental and vocal music were rendered and the augmented choir added to the service of song, to the delight

of the congregation assembled. The Rev. Thomas P. Holloway delivered an eloquent sermon appropriate to the celebration, in which he complimented both pastor and people for the wonderful continuance of the interest in the old Church, whose later days were among the brightest of its history, unique and glorious in its record of the days of yore.

Addresses were delivered, expressive of the good and great things accomplished by the worthies whose names are fondly cherished by the Baptist fraternity and neighboring communities. The Rev. George M. Owen, of Cohansey, brought greetings. The Rev. C. Harold Thompson, of Woodstown, paid a fine tribute to the history of the Church. Rev. Frank Stanton, of Salem, gave a stirring address on the value of loyalty to the Truth. Mr. Minch, of Bridgeton, extended congratulations. The rally exercises closed with the pastor giving the prayer and benediction.

Congratulatory letters were received and read by the Church Clerk, Warren Shafer, Esq., at the afternoon rally session from the following: Hon. John Wanamaker, Hon. Charles Evans Hughes, Secretary of State; Woodrow Wilson, President Harding, Hon. John Warren Davis, Judge of U. S. Court of Appeals; the Philadelphia Baptist Members Conference, et. al.

NOTE: The publication of this Historic Sermon and Rally Day exercises of our Two Hundred and Fortieth Anniversary is made possible through the generosity of a dear friend, whose friendship and acquaintance I have enjoyed for many years—Mr. Chas. L. Kuen, of Melrose Park, Pa., whose sainted grandparents are resting in the old Cemetery awaiting the Blessed and Glorious summons to come up Higher.

This beautiful Meeting House was erected during the self-sacrificing labors of the late and beloved Rev. Levanus Myers. The Auditorium is among the finest in South Jersey. Its furnishings are as suitable as its stained glass windows are artistic, and as appropriate as the spirit that placed them in the Meeting House, to the Glory of God.

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